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# The “Language tournament” within the Swedish school system (1849-1946)

Béatrice Cabau

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- 1 After the deep-rooted hegemony of Latin, foreign language teaching was given a place of honour within the Swedish school curriculum from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The three languages, German, French and English, occupied in turn the position of first foreign language taught. This educational choice reflected multifaceted stakes in the social, cultural, educational, pedagogical, economic and political domains. Furthermore, this choice was guided by the influence and attraction of the languages and cultures of the major European nations exerted domestically. Hence, the Swedish school arena was the stage of a language tournament for more than a century, which ended in the mid-twentieth century with the compulsory learning of English for all pupils.
- 2 This article will first briefly outline the development of the Swedish school system from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward. It will then turn to the status of the German, French and English languages and cultures, before investigating the role and position of foreign language teaching within the Swedish school curriculum. Section 3 examines the establishment of English as first foreign language taught after a long tournament with its rival languages.

## 1. Debates and reforms in the Swedish school system

- 3 From the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the primary objective of teaching was to train future priests. The School Act of 1649 divided secondary education into *trivialskolor* (lower secondary schools) and *gymnasier* (upper secondary schools created in the 1620s), with both institutions offering four-year schooling (Marklund 1996: 12). The *gymnasier* would not be the object of important reforms for the following two centuries. In 1724, a new lower secondary school class was introduced, the *apologist*

*klass*, a sort of trade-oriented course that included reading, writing and arithmetic, but no Latin. In 1820, the *apologist* classes were replaced by *apologist* schools in order to meet the demands for the common citizens' education and to provide practical knowledge for the commercial profession (Wennås 1966: 376).

- 4 At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment and the changes taking place in the structure of Swedish society led to the introduction of the School Ordinance of 1807. It was then for the first time that an official school regulation mentioned that teaching should not only be intended for future priests or civil servants (Staaf & Martin 1922: 176). Furthermore, it made French and German official subjects in *gymnasier* and *apologistskolor*. Nevertheless, this ordinance hardly modified the profile of these schools in practice, since the Lutheran Church ruled the school institutions with a firm hand and was opposed to any innovation (Malmberg 1986: 17). Hence, *gymnasier* remained primarily organised for male pupils, who were the future members of the clergy and the civil service (Wennås 1966: 376).
- 5 In 1812, a committee appointed by the government held an inquiry into the school system, during which an intense debate erupted about the place that should be accorded to the teaching of Latin, considered the fundamental language ("grundläggande språk") and the most appropriate for shaping a student's spirit (Tengström 1973: 100; Wennås 1966: 125). Partisans of utilitarianism, represented in education by Liberals, claimed that the State had to fulfil the demands emanating from all social classes; that is, education should not only cater for pupils from privileged social and economic backgrounds wishing to enter the civil service or the clergy, but also those seeking other professions. The members of the bourgeoisie and the peasantry wanted to give a more practical orientation to secondary education and to see the teaching of modern languages occupy a greater place within it. Individuals were to be educated in order to contribute to progress and modernization of the country and to be productive, i.e. useful citizens. The Conservatives advocated a Neo-Humanistic ideal in education, impregnated with classicism and aristocratic values. For them, education was not to achieve immediate practical utility but rather the development of intelligence, which was supposed to be stimulated by the learning of classical languages. It was also a means to maintain control over the people and to preserve the social order (Cabau-Lampa 1998: 84, 2004: 232, 2005: 97). The educational debate hence positioned two competing groups: on the one hand, the upper nobility, upper clergy, and guild-based burghers made up the conservative group opposed to mass schooling; on the other hand, the lower nobility and lower clergy, merchants and industrial burghers and non-noble gentry, and the freehold peasants formed the liberal or progressive camp (Boli 1989: 32). It is also important to mention the role played by the department of Church Affairs (*Ecklesiastikdepartementet*), the department in charge of the Swedish school system, created in 1840).
- 6 The guiding educational principle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was that "a schooled population would be more productive economically and more active and engaged as citizens contributing to national political and social development" (Boli 1989: 218). From the 1830s, the Swedish aimed to modernize society and facilitate the pursuit of progress. In this context, the *folkskola* (literally "people's school" or "school for the people") was created in 1842. It offered primary education that now became compulsory for children aged seven (although this was fully implemented only at the end of the century). Primary education was, however, limited in time: four to six years. The 1849 reform of

secondary education introduced two common core classes for all pupils (which would exist until 1878), and two streams (classical and modern). The *apologist* schools and the *lärdomsskolor* were merged to provide lower secondary education with a link to the *gymnasier*. The number of school years was not specified at that time. Even after the 1849 reform, Latin, Greek and Hebrew continued to dominate the timetable. From 1856, secondary education comprised nine school years (Richardson 1999: 66).

- 7 The ideological debate mentioned above was exacerbated in the 1880s, under the influence of rationalism, positivism, atheism, and anticlericalism (Wennås 1966: 385). The modern stream created in 1849, which gave more importance to modern languages and mathematics, was not seen as sufficient to create a school for citizenship. The Church still tried to defend the values of Latin learning and classical learning, but met strong opposition from public opinion represented by radicals and liberals, burghers and farmers (Boucher 1982: 10). The societal environment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was challenged after the First World War by the political dominance of the Social Democrats and their principles of "equality, solidarity, and the transcending value of the common good" (Boli 1989: 255). What is interesting here is that the increasing claim for utilitarianism made by the middle classes and the peasantry on the one hand, and the ideological guidelines of democratisation of education and active citizenship on the other, did not clash, but on the contrary merged with egalitarian principles to establish English as the first foreign language in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 8 In 1905, the *realskola* (lower secondary school between the *folkskola* and the *gymnasium*) was created, adapting schooling to the requirements of a society where industry and trade were playing an increasingly determining role. Latin disappeared from the curriculum. The duration of schooling at the *realskola* was four or five years. Access to the *gymnasium* remained restricted to an elite whose members, if they passed the *studentexamen*, were able to continue their studies at university. Girls were given access only to lower secondary education in 1907 and then to upper secondary education in the 1920s. In 1927, the duration of compulsory primary education was set at six years, and seven years from 1936. There were different kinds of lower secondary schools: the seven-year elementary compulsory school (*folkskola*), not directly linked to academic schools or university; and the lower secondary school, *realskola*. Children who wanted to continue to higher education had to shift from *folkskola* to *realskola* in Form 4 or 5, whereas the great majority stayed in *folkskola* until age 14. For decades, criticisms were levelled against this parallel school system, with a view to establishing a single form of primary schooling (Boucher 1982).
- 9 In 1946, after the Second World War, a school commission was set up by parliament to develop policy guidelines for the democratisation of public education. The objective was the creation of the *grundskola*, the new and unique framework of the compulsory school system, which was to replace the *folkskola* and *realskola*. The diverse proposals made by this commission originated from the idea that the school system had to adapt itself to the social structure and cultural needs of the time in a country that was experiencing "a process of social transformation" (SOU 1948: 269). In 1962, the upper part of the *folkskola*, the *realskola*, the girls' school and parts of former vocational schemes became, in a combined form, the upper grades of the comprehensive school. As we will see below, the issue of language choice, i.e. what foreign language should be taught first, was at the core of the educational debate at this time.

## 2. Images and influences of foreignness

### 2.1 German

- 10 Up to the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the exception of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the German influence has always been strong in Sweden. Its importance was largely due to the fact that the members of the ruling class and intellectual circles (e.g. the historian Geijer and the poet Tegnér) were Germanophiles for the most part (Cabau-Lampa 1998: 565). It is also worth noting that Swedish political life was influenced by German politics: the Swedish Social Democratic Workers' Party was created in 1889, inspired by the German Gotha Programme (Nordmann 1971: 129), the party platform adopted by the newly created German Social Democratic Party in 1875. As we will see, the power of the Second German Reich resulted in the increase of German classes at Swedish schools. The value of learning German for further study would remain the main obstacle to the implementation of English as first foreign language until the 1940s. This is explained by the fact that in the 1920s and the 1930s, access to the *realskola* was still restricted to a minority of pupils who were likely to pursue their studies at university, and hence needed knowledge of German. Most of the fine literature was in German, English and French. At that time, and for several years after the Second World War, no one in Sweden could claim to be an "intellectual" if he or she did not master the German language. Nevertheless, at the end of the First World War, Germany began to lose some of its prestige, which had unsurprisingly an impact on the position of the German language in many European countries. Furthermore, during the same period, the Swedish elite was losing some of its power. It was the end of the influence of the Germany that had inspired civil servants, businessmen, intellectuals and Socialists alike (Stenström 1993: 313).

### 2.2 French

- 11 The influence of the French language and culture had been very strong in Sweden during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially among members of the elite. French influence had been much more salient in Sweden than in Norway or Denmark (Gellerstam 2005: 2074; Winge 2005a: 2147). The Gallomania of King Gustav III (1746-1792) played a major role in enhancing the position of the French language and culture (Cabau-Lampa 1998: 482). French was used as a *lingua franca* at court, among the aristocracy and in diplomacy. But this "cultural servitude" was highly criticized in the light of the values of Gothicism from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This nationalist ideology was reinforced to counteract the political and moral ideals of the French Revolution that could "dangerously" spread in Sweden and appeared as a reaction of national pride against the territorial loss of Finland in 1809 (Östman 2006: 631). Francophilia was also criticised by a political faction called the Nightcaps or "Caps", whose political opponents were the so-called "Hats", Francophile supporters of the alliance with France against Britain and especially Russia. The Caps believed the Court of France was not only responsible for the setbacks suffered by Sweden during the Pomeranian War (1757-1762), but also represented a kind of moral depravity that went against their ideal Scandinavian purity. French manners and clothes, tastes and moral superficiality etc. were opposed to Swedish simplicity, honesty, industriousness, and open, unaffected and trustworthy relationships (Nordmann 1971: 273). The fact that Sweden

was in search of a new national identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century may also have played a role here. This identity developed as a struggle between the social classes (Winge 2005b: 2103). The French language and culture mirrored the image of elitism represented by the upper class and the nobility, seen as the antithesis to the educational principles of Swedish citizenship. It is interesting to note here that in neighbour Germany, French learning was not only popular among the upper class, but also among the tradesmen and lower middle classes (Reinfried 2014: 258). This might be one of the reasons for the stronger position of French learning in the German school curriculum than in the Swedish school curriculum.

- 12 Despite the dislike or even hatred felt by Swedish aristocrats for Napoleon, Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, a former marshal of France, ascended the throne of Sweden in 1818, and became King Charles XIV. However, the presence of rulers of French origin had no substantial impact on the enhancement of teaching French. It is also worth stressing that the influence of the French language and culture occurred at a time when foreign language teaching was done mainly in the private sector (Hammar 2001: 155). Furthermore, differences in the influence exerted by the German and French languages/cultures also offer some explanations for the choice of the first foreign language. First, German influence on Sweden appeared earlier than the French, and lasted longer. Second, this influence had been felt not only among the elite at court, but also among several strata of Swedish society.

## 2.3 English

- 13 Swedes began to show some interest in England and the English language from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the prevailing German romanticism, with Gothicism movements and the still important interest in French language and culture, probably left little room for the promotion of English teaching. In fact, the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been described as the “prehistory” of English teaching (Bratt 1984: 13), since German and French were at that time exclusively occupying the stage of foreign language teaching. From the 1840s, English harvested the fruits of democratization of public education. Unlike in the cases of French and German, it was not the members of the Swedish elite who highlighted the need to learn English; rather, it was members of the bourgeoisie, who had become powerful enough to have the full right to speak and to make understood the economic value of learning English for industry and commerce (Cabau-Lampa 1998: 586).
- 14 This “language tournament” (Cabau-Lampa 1998: 2004), which took place between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, reflected a conflict of interests, essentially social: the ruling circles (State and Church) were opposed to the expansion of English, which had become a strong contender against German, while the bourgeoisie and working classes considered learning English a means to acquire a knowledge that they now needed in their daily life and work (trade, shipping, etc.). English was considered a factor enabling social promotion. Demands to strengthen the position of English in schools were also particularly forceful among the coastal cities of the country. Indeed, the share of trade on the Swedish market between Sweden and England exceeded that of trade between Sweden and Germany. In addition, Sweden was gradually industrializing during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: 13% of the economically active population

was engaged in industry and skilled trades in the 1870s (Boli 1989: 31). Swedish society felt that they must be able to respond to emerging needs.

- 15 In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sweden turned more and more towards England and the United States, a country whose political, economic and cultural expansion was increasingly being felt at different levels of Swedish everyday life. Swedes were becoming interested in liberal politics led by these two powers, the phenomenon of the industrial revolution, now in full swing, and various popular movements, including an interest in Anglo-Saxon literature and in British sports (Bratt 1984: 13). Many English publications arrived in Sweden, disseminating new technological innovations, and there was British investment in various Swedish companies for the construction of railways, forestry and mining. It was also at this time that many words of English origin began to appear in the Swedish language (Bratt 1984: 14), such as *lokomotiv*, *komfortabel*, *turist*, *lawntennis*, *jobb*, *strejk*, etc.
- 16 Another factor worked in favour of the teaching of English, namely the phenomenon of emigration to the United States from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Sweden had experienced several epidemics and high unemployment. So a new need emerged, textbooks in English for emigrants to the United States. Some of these emigrant Swedes later returned to their country and certainly contributed to injecting new vitality into the world of capital and technology with implications in agriculture and industry. The presence in the country of these people who had experienced American life increased the interest the Swedes began to have in Anglo-American civilization. In 1944, 17% of Swedes could understand English (Johansson 2004).

### 3. The role and position of foreign languages

#### 3.1 Setting the scene: before the official introduction of foreign language teaching in Swedish schools

- 17 As early as the mid-1700s, some voices pointed to the neglect of modern languages (together with that of natural sciences, mathematics, and economics) in the existing school system, which was holding back the economy and was therefore at odds with the interests of the State. According to this utilitarian reasoning, education should be not merely cultivating, but also useful (Boli 1989: 70), views also echoed at universities by some scholars (Gren-Eklund 2011: 57). The scientific achievements of influential men such as the scientist, inventor and industrialist Christopher Polhem (1661-1751) and the botanist, physician, and zoologist Carl von Linné (1707-1778) gave impetus to the importance of modern languages in education (SOU 1944: 37). It is also important to mention here the influence of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (*Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien*, founded in 1739) on the development of Swedish scientific prose and on the Swedish written language. The Academy chose to use the vernacular, and not Latin, for its transactions. This choice reflected a time "when utilitarianism, economism and republican utopianism had taken over from ideologies like religious orthodoxy, antiquarian historicism and the glorification of autocracy" (Teleman 2011: 83), and this would encourage scientific departments at Swedish universities to abandon Latin for teaching and research. The Swedish Academy, founded on the model of the *Académie française* in 1786 by the Francophile monarch Gustav III, also played an essential role in the development and promotion of the Swedish language, and hence



the declining use of Latin, even if Swedish was introduced as a school subject only in 1807 (Thavenius 1999: 12). The importance of Swedish in the curriculum was clearly and frequently referred to from the 1820s onwards (Staaf & Martin 1922: 182), and this was to help German gain the position of first foreign language, thanks to its similarities with Swedish.

- 18 Meanwhile, the attempt to reform state schools in the light of social utility was strongly opposed by the Church. It is no surprise, then, that the number of private schools offering modern language instruction significantly expanded in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Evidence can be found in the number of advertisements for such schools published in *Dagligt Allehanda*, one of the major newspapers of the period: 0 in 1767 against circa 300 in 1821 (Boli 1989: 74). These private schools were popular among burghers and non-noble gentry, and several of them were open to females to address the need of educating all individuals and citizens. The linguistic training offered in private schools for girls (state subsidized from the 1870s onward) was more practically oriented, focusing on the spoken language rather than on grammar, in order to equip pupils for positions as translators or governesses. This explains why the teachers in these schools were more committed to issues related to the methodology of modern languages (principally French and English) than their colleagues in public education (Usselman 1993: 34).

### 3.2 Modern language teaching in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

- 19 The year 1807 is critical in the history of the teaching of modern languages, since German and French were from this point on introduced as official subjects into the public *apologistskolor* and *gymnasier* (but not in the *lärdomsskolorna*). One of these two modern languages could be chosen by the pupils. At the *gymnasium* they replaced the learning of Hebrew; the teaching was limited to two hours per week in the last three school years (Hammar 2001: 146-147). Meanwhile, English was seldom taught in private schools. In 1828, the Education Committee, under the chairmanship of Crown Prince Oscar I, Bernadotte's son, proposed that French become the first language taught (Cabau-Lampa 1998: 438). Although this proposal was rejected, the place of French in secondary education in 1849 was very respectable, even though its learning began after that of German. German was then the first language taught, introduced in the second school year (whereas Latin learning was introduced in Form 3 only). Nevertheless, in the modern stream, the total number of German and French hours during all school years was very similar (35 against 32.5, Table 1: *infra*). English occupied a small place in the timetable compared to German and French, but it was made compulsory in the modern stream. The 1849 Ordinance was important for foreign language teaching since it drastically increased the number of hours and hence enhanced the professionalisation of teachers (Staaf & Martin 1922: 190). The introduction of English in the modern stream as well at *apologistskolor* illustrated the recognition of the value of this language in terms of preparation to professional life and of acquisition of practical competences (Hammar 2001: 148).
- 20 From 1856 to 1859, French teaching was at its peak: it was introduced in the second school year and became the first language taught, with Latin postponed to the third school year (as in 1849) together with German. English was introduced in Form 4 in the modern stream (Table 1: *infra*). One might have thought that the influence of Oscar I



(who became king of Norway and Sweden in 1844) upon the Minister of Religious Affairs Lars Anton Anjou (1855-1859) played a role in asserting French as first foreign language. But in fact, the decision may have been the result of Anjou's arguments: the future bishop considered that if Latin was to disappear from the school curriculum, it should be best replaced by another Romance language, French. No proper education could exist without the knowledge of Germanic *and* Romance languages. There was no need to learn German then, since Swedish was a Germanic language (Wennås 1966: 197; Henriksson 1960: 90). Nevertheless, the 1856 School ordinance faced severe criticisms within the Parliament (not least because of the introduction of French as the first foreign language): knowledge of German was seen as indispensable in Swedish daily life – in trade, agriculture, skilled trades, and particularly in the domains of science and industry. Moreover, it was an easy language to learn since it was genetically related to Swedish. Meanwhile, French was viewed as exacerbating elitism at schools: it was a language too difficult to learn as early as in Form 2 and of little use, except for diplomats and courtiers (SOU 1938: 13).

- 21 In fact, the privileged position of French would last for only three years (1856-1859), and German was reintroduced as the first foreign language with the 1859 School ordinance. Learning French was postponed to Form 5 in the classical stream, i.e. two years after Latin, and to Form 4 in the modern stream (see Table 1: *infra*), even if French language advocates claimed that it was precisely because French was difficult that it had to be introduced as the first foreign language. They also stressed the new alliance signed between Sweden and France, signed in 1855 to secure Swedish territory against Russian ambitions (Wennås 1966: 180). The year 1859 corresponds to the date when Oscar I (who was struck with insanity in 1857) had to leave the regency to his son, the future Charles XV, and when Anjou quit office. From 1859, the number of French classes per week continued to decline (even if the total number of French classes throughout all secondary education was still higher than for German and English: Table 1: *infra*), mainly because of the reputation of French as a difficult language. English was introduced earlier than French in the modern stream, which seems to reflect the importance given to this language for practical purposes. The fact that Latin learning was restricted to the classical stream, and the presence of German, French and English in the timetable of the modern stream, signal the recognition that a thorough education could not be envisaged anymore without modern languages (Staaf & Martin 1922: 195).
- 22 With the accession to the throne of the Germanophile Oscar II (one of Oscar I's sons) in 1872, Swedish political life was impregnated with conservatism and the prevailing nationalism. German victory in the 1870-71 war together with France's return to a republican regime scared right-wing politicians, and most scholars were more and more attracted by Germany (Stenström 1993: 313). The 1872 Secondary School Committee was in favour of reintroducing Latin as the first foreign language in both streams to secure a solid formal education and to facilitate the acquisition of other languages, but to no avail. The Committee's arguments were that Swedish could not fulfil the role of fundamental language (*grundläggande språk*) (Staaf & Martin 1922: 208), i.e. as a mental discipline, "the language of analysis, reasoning and argument" (Teleman 2011: 84). In 1878, German was not only the first language taught in both streams, but was also introduced in Form 1 (see Table 2: *infra*). The argument here was mainly pedagogical: the simultaneous learning of Swedish and German was believed to help pupils grasp and master grammar rules as well as terminology in Nordic

languages. As in other European countries, grammatical analysis was praised as “a discipline for developing formal reasoning or, in other words, for promoting abstract thought” (Reinfried 2014: 266). Furthermore, acquisition of formal grammar knowledge and logical reasoning could help the learning of other languages. Apart from its practical importance, a pedagogical argument was also used to justify including English in the classical stream, namely the presence of numerous German elements in the English language, which would facilitate access to the “excellent” English literature (SOU 1938: 6). The number of English and French classes throughout all secondary education was equal in the modern stream (see Table 2: *infra*), but French remained the third language taught.

- 23 During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the authors of language textbooks took a closer look at teaching methodology. A debate on foreign language teaching methods developed on the European Continent in the 1880s. In 1886 the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen, the Swedish phonetician Johan August Lundell and the Norwegian linguist August Western founded an association for the reform of the teaching of languages, Quousque Tandem. This association was named after the pseudonym (and motto) used by the German Anglicist Wilhelm Viëtor for his pamphlet *Der Sprachunterricht muß umkehren!* (*Language teaching must start afresh!*). Its members criticized the principles of the grammar-translation method, which neglected the spoken language. The association formulated four principles: (1) the modern and spoken language must form the basis of the teaching, while phonetic script should be used for teaching pronunciation; (2) the texts should be modern; (3) grammar should be learned inductively; and (4) less translation work should be done, while more oral and written repetitions and free essays should be encouraged in the target language (Usselman 1993: 34). The 1890 School Committee deplored the strong emphasis put on written proficiency and proposed that oral exercises should be made compulsory (SOU 1938: 32, 17). Nevertheless, the grammar-translation method would survive (albeit in a somewhat mitigated form) in secondary education a long time into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Malmberg 1986: 19).
- 24 A new timetable introduced in 1895 did not bring along major change as for the distribution of language classes. German was taught in all years, and the number of English hours somewhat increased, while the number of French classes decreased (see Table 2: *infra*). French was now definitively considered as playing a lesser role than German, and even English, on the international stage (Staaf & Martin 1922: 226). The 1895 ordinance prescribed some sessions of oral exercises on the line of the direct method, and the 1902 Education Committee highlighted the need for language teachers with further linguistic training in the target-language country (Staaf & Martin 1922: 219). A secondary education committee set up in 1899 pointed out the difficulty of assessing the pedagogical and formative value of any language against the other; hence, the practical aspect was decisive in choosing the first foreign language to be taught. The committee stressed the importance of relations between Germany and Sweden in several domains, including religion, as well as the availability of German teachers (versus the number of teachers able to teach French) to justify the position of German at schools. From 1905, lower secondary school pupils were required to learn only two languages, German and English, compared to four previously (Latin, German, English and French). French was absent from the *realskola* curriculum, while it remained in both streams of the *gymnasium*, but was postponed to the second year of high school. Moreover, the number of German hours (34) and of English hours (28 in the modern stream) was much higher than the number of French hours (12) (see Table 2: *infra*).

Hence, French was the big loser in this "language tournament". The disappearance of classical languages, combined with the reduced number of French classes, was viewed by some as an expression of philistinism by the authors of the 1905 school reform (Johansson 2004). At the same time, a few schools (mainly private) were engaged in pilot activities with English as first language by local initiative. It seems then that Sweden appears as an exception, in that from the middle of the 19th century French was not the main modern language to be taught at secondary level as it was in southern and Western Europe (Reinfried 2014: 264).

### 3.3 The German model under scrutiny

- 25 The 1922 School Commission proposed replacing German with English as first foreign language, based on the results of the above-mentioned pilot activities, which had shown that the introduction of English at an early age was more effective than learning German: English proved more appropriate and suitable for young learners' understanding and facility of language acquisition, while the learning of German at a slightly later stage proved to give fully satisfactory results (SOU 1938: 6). The proposed position of English as first foreign language was justified by the objective of practical utility, now a guiding line in secondary education, which was supported by the rapid spread of English in several domains. And this spread was not restricted to a social class, since English was understood even by many less educated people, thanks to immigration and emigration: many Swedes came back from the United States, while others exchanged letters with friends or relatives who had emigrated to the New World. Hence, English had become "everyman's language" (Johansson 2004) and was on the way to becoming the universal language. Moreover, changes in international relations (the defeat of Germany in 1918 combined with the increasing importance of Britain and the United States of America) supported the new status of English at Swedish schools. For the 1922 School Commission, establishing German as the first foreign language would have been tantamount to the indirect legacy left by Latin teaching, i.e. to give priority to the study of grammar and translation exercises (Staaf & Martin 1922: 254). But grammar must be given a secondary place in favour of the language itself, and the idea of "fundamental language" was misleading and somewhat outdated. The Commission members supported the presence of two foreign languages at *realskola*, not only from the perspective of general civic education, but also in light of the world context, i.e. conflicts between major powers, which would make it hazardous to opt for the teaching of a single foreign language (Staaf & Martin 1922: 248). The Commission proposed to establish German in the second position, with the possibility for pupils for whom German knowledge was more crucial than English to opt for the combination of German (as first foreign language) and English. Nevertheless, given the need for employees able to speak French for trade and industrial relations, provision should be made (although this was ultimately not accepted) to offer two other combinations: German and French, or English and French. In any case, French could not claim to be the first foreign language, because of its relative lack of perceived usefulness.
- 26 Nevertheless, with the 1927 school reform, these arguments were dismissed in favour of a recurrent argument, i.e. the importance of German as the first foreign language to fulfil the role of "fundamental language". German supporters also stressed the good relations that Sweden had with Germany and the fact that Sweden would, in future,

have more contacts in the south than in the west. At the same time, apart from the normal combination of German and English, the only other one to be offered would be English and German. If French was still described as "language of the civilized world" together with German, it was not included in any language combination. Meanwhile, the importance of English, which could not fulfil the role of "fundamental language" because of its too recent emergence as a major language in Europe, was more widely recognized. English supporters were generally Social-Democrats, but the political or ideological divide was far from being clear: Social-Democrats, liberals and nationalists could be found in both camps, likewise both Germanophiles and Anglophiles (Johansson 2004).

- 27 The School Ordinance of 1933 provided for the following number of hours per week of language tuition over five years at *realskola*: 23 hours in German, 13 in English and 7 in French. Several schools were still involved in pilot activities, with English as their first foreign language taught. The 1937 commission shared the same views as the 1922 Commission, i.e. to establish English as the first foreign language at the four-year and five-year *realskola* from Form 1. German and other foreign languages would be introduced in Form 2. From then on, English was considered as incorporating essential educational values not from the perspective of formal education (an asset until then reserved to Latin, German and even French to a lesser extent), but for its increasing use at the international level (SOU 1938: 32). One could have expected German teachers to be fiercely opposed to English teaching. But in fact, the lesser emphasis put on grammar in educational debates was appreciated by many teachers who rebelled against what could be called the pedagogical dictatorship of German grammar. This rebellion led them to support English teaching (Johansson 2004). The authoritarian and strict features of German teaching would, unsurprisingly, be exacerbated some years later by the features of the Nazi regime (Cabau-Lampa 1998: 567). During the 1940s, English gradually replaced German as the first foreign language taught at *realskola*, and the 1946 School Commission supported this language choice. English was introduced in the curriculum of primary schools (*folkskola*) in the 1950s. As we will see, the choice of the first foreign language would be a central issue in the debate about the implementation of the compulsory school (the *grundskola*, combining primary and lower secondary education) after the Second World War.
- 28 The popularity of English was also reflected in adult education circles: for example, in the most important educational association, *Arbetarnas bildningsförbund*, 344 study circles were dedicated to learning English, compared to 155 for German. In 1937/38, the figures were respectively 711 versus 113, indicating a declining interest of adult Swedes in the German language (Cabau-Lampa 1998: 630). Swedes became more familiar with English through movies, radio broadcasts, and professional and social activities (Bratt 1984: 13; Johansson 2004). Last but not least, trade relations between Sweden and German-speaking countries sharply decreased after the First World War: they dropped from 28% of the total trade transactions of Sweden in 1914 down to 10% in 1919, compared to 47% for English-speaking countries in the same year. On the eve of the Second World War, the relevant figures were almost 20% vs 37% (SOU 1938: 211).

## 4. The new era introduced by the 1946 Commission

- 29 From 1932 to 1946, priority was given to "social and economic welfare state reforms with Social Democratic predominance" (Paulston 1968: 3). School decision-makers were aware of the growing necessity of foreign language knowledge for all nations without a "language of the civilized world" (*kulturspråk* in Swedish or *Kultursprache* in German) as mother tongue (SOU 1944: 20, 76). Not all of those who supported English as first foreign language rejected the values of German: some were still convinced of the necessity to learn it in order to grasp European culture. Others warned about the risk of despising German on the grounds of the defeat of Nazi Germany. If no teacher pleaded for German as the first foreign language in the educational press, several were in favour of its preservation in the curriculum of secondary schools (Johansson 2004).
- 30 Immediately after the Second World War, the main educational project was the creation of the future 9-year *grundskola*, the new and unique framework of the compulsory school system, meant to replace the *realskola*. The new school system had to be implemented from the perspective of the democratization of public instruction. The 1946 School Commission stressed the importance of foreign language knowledge, even if it seemed to be more appropriate to "gifted", "talented" or "intelligent" pupils (SOU 1948: 66). English was to be the first foreign language taught, as the result of positive pilot activities, the defeat of Nazi Germany and the increasing importance of the United States. It was to correct the then existing flaw in civic education, where foreign language teaching had been reserved for a minority in the up to then elitist Swedish school system (*ibid.*: 7). English learning for all pupils was meant to help bridge the social gap. English learning for all was also seen as enabling Swedish citizens to discover and understand what was going on in the world. English learning should be more interesting, lively, and practically oriented than German learning in the past. The teaching of English (which was proposed to be compulsory from Form 5 to 7 only) should not discourage pupils (*ibid.*: 199). With the creation of the *grundskola* in 1962, English was to be compulsory from Form 4 to 9, and German and French became optional subjects from Form 7 to 9. The introduction of English as a compulsory subject for all pupils benefited from a social consensus and the principle of equal opportunities for all, the cornerstone of Swedish school policy. Nowadays, English is seen not so much as a foreign language, but as a second language in Sweden (Cabau 2005: 106). The year 1962 is considered a milestone in the history of French teaching in Sweden, because it left the "sort of elitist ghetto" where it has been locked due to a certain Swedish school tradition (Karlsson 1994: 6). Indeed, this was the first time during the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was put on an equal footing with German as optional subject.

## 5. Concluding remarks

- 31 In Sweden, as in many other European countries, the principles of formal education have been long supported by the learning of classical languages, mainly Latin. Hence, modern languages had to struggle to assert their status in the school system in order to be recognized as useful and even necessary subjects, i.e. as tools for access to knowledge and practical purposes. This means that research into the history of foreign language teaching in a given European country has to encompass the position of classical languages as well as the position of the mother tongue. In Sweden, the

language war was two-fold: one opposed two camps, classical languages against modern languages; and another one consisted of a long lasting rivalry between German, French and the latecomer English to be designated the most appropriate language to be first taught.

- 32 The replacement of Latin by German as "fundamental language" – i.e. a fully elaborated language that could be used for all academic and scientific purposes through the development of reasoning capacities among pupils to support formal education – in the 19<sup>th</sup> century gave German the logical supremacy from an educational perspective. The predominance of German teaching was sustained by the close and long- lasting relations Sweden had with Germany culturally, economically and politically. But the supporters of a more democratic schooling with utilitarian values presented the German language as an elite language, and asserted that its study resulted in too low achievements and was of limited utility compared to English learning. In the language tournament that took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, French was a weak adversary for German and then English. Except for a very short period, as we have seen (1856-1859), it had to struggle continuously to maintain its position in the school curriculum. It was long associated with the image of an elitist and accessory language.
- 33 From the 1840s, the new ideal of education for all citizens, and its practical utility, paved the way to the consecration of English within the Swedish school curriculum. The latter had to be adapted to labour market needs so as to prepare pupils for working life (and not only for higher studies) and to provide well-educated citizens. Education had a role to play in the economic growth of the country. Hence, foreign language learning was no longer restricted to privileged pupils and no longer only related to cultural and pedagogical issues. Here lies the main difference of argumentation between English learning and German or French learning from the 1940s: English learning was aimed at *all* pupils and useful in *all* domains. In fact, German and French were no match for English, since it represented the perfect combination of *all* stakes: the objective of democracy of the Swedish society with the democratization of the school system; a more efficient language instruction (an easier language to acquire than German and French) which would help Sweden sustain its increasing trade relations with English-speaking countries and would advance the internationalization of the Swedish economy; and the concept of active citizenship where every Swede would gain an international insight and could contribute to the prosperity of the nation.
- 34 The result is that a lack of proficiency in English has for years been viewed as a serious social handicap for Swedish citizens. As for German and French, they have been facing a big challenge since the introduction in 1994 of Spanish as another choice for second foreign language. The consequence is that if the language tournament is long over as regards the first foreign language to be taught, this new but very strong rival has led to another language tournament within the Swedish school system, with Spanish being nowadays the most popular second foreign language among young Swedes.



Table 1: Number of hours allotted to foreign language teaching in Swedish secondary education 1849 -1905 <sup>12</sup>

1849	Common core		Classical stream						Modern stream						TOTAL / STREAM			
CLASSES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	3	4	5	6	7	8	classical		modern	
German	-	8	6½	4½	2	2	2	2	6½	4½	4	4	4	4	27		35	
French	-	-	-	6½	4	4	4	4	-	6½	6½	6½	6½	6½	22½		32½	
English	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4½	4½	4½	4½	-		18	

1856	Common core		Classical stream						Modern stream								TOTAL / STREAM	
CLASSES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8:1	8:2	3	4	5	6	7	8:1	8:2	classical	modern
German	-	-	4	2	3	3	3	2	-	4	4	5	5	5	3	3	17	29
French	-	8	4	3	3	2	3	2	-	6	6	5	5	5	4	4	25	43
English	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	5	5	5	3	3	-	26

1859	Common core		Classical stream						Modern stream								TOTAL/STREAM	
CLASSES	1	2	3	4	5	6:1	6:2	7:1	7:2	3	4	5	6:1	6:2	7:1	7:2	classical	modern
German	-	6	4	2	2	1	1	-	-	5	3	2	2	2	-	-	18	22
French	-	-	-	-	3	4	4	5	3	-	3	4	5	5	5	5	22	31
English	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	-	22

1878	Common core					Classical stream A				Classical stream B				Modern stream				TOTAL /STREAM		
CLASSES	1	2	3	4	5	6:1	6:2	7:1	7:2	6:1	6:2	7:1	7:2	6:1	6:2	7:1	7:2	A	B	modern
German	6	7	7	4	3	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	2	-	29	29	31
French	-	-	-	-	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	17	19	21
English	-	-	-	7	7	-	-	-	-	4	4	2	2	4	4	5	5	14	19	21
1895	Common core					Classical stream A				Classical stream B				Modern stream				TOTAL /STREAM		
CLASSES	1	2	3	4	5	6:1	6:2	7:1	7:2	6:1	6:2	7:1	7:2	6:1	6:2	7:1	7:2	A	B	mod.
German	6	7	6	4	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	34	30	30
French	-	-	-	-	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	17	19	19
English	-	-	-	6	6	-	-	-	(2)	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	12/14	22	24
1905	Lower secondary school					Total		Upper secondary school								Total for Lower and upper secondary schools				
	Realskola							Modern				Classical								
CLASSES	1	2	3	4	5	6		I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV		modern		classical	
German	6	6	6	4	4	3	29	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2		34		34	
French	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	4	-	4	4	4		12		12	
English	-	-	-	5	5	4	14	3	3	2	4	2	2	2	2		22		18	

Table 2: Number of hours allotted to foreign language teaching in Swedish secondary education 1849 –1905 (continuation)

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## NOTES

1. From 1856, Form 8 lasted two years (Form 8:1 and 8:2). For practical reasons, Form 8:2 appears in the Form 9 column.
  2. The fifth form actually lasted two years.
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## RÉSUMÉS

Cet article analyse la lutte pour la position de première langue moderne enseignée opposant l'allemand, le français et l'anglais dans le programme scolaire suédois à partir du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'à la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. L'étude met en valeur les principaux arguments utilisés pour justifier ce choix de langue. Il s'avère que ce choix s'appuyait sur des enjeux multidimensionnels qui relevaient des domaines pédagogique/éducatif, social, politique/idéologique, culturel et économique pour se refléter en milieu scolaire.

This article investigates the struggle for the position of first modern language taught (German, French or English) in the Swedish school curriculum from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to after the Second World War. It highlights the main arguments put forward to justify the language choice. It reveals that this choice was supported by multidimensional factors that encompassed the pedagogical/educational, social, political/ideological, cultural, and economic domains reflected in the school arena.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés :** Suède, XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, enseignement des langues étrangères, allemand langue étrangère, français langue étrangère, anglais langue étrangère, fonction éducative de l'apprentissage d'une langue

**Keywords :** Sweden, 19<sup>th</sup> century, 20<sup>th</sup> century, Foreign language teaching, German as a Foreign Language, French as a Foreign Language, English as a Foreign Language, Educational function of language learning

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